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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed the specific assignments in the television production courses at 175 United States colleges and universities. The following conclusions were drawn from the analyses of the data collected: Television production courses involve the students with television production formats identical to those found in the broadcast industry. Expensive and elaborate television productions are not encouraged, due to limited money, personnel, and facilities. Courses dealing with video experimentation in both narrative and electronic forms are less popular and have a very low priority in television production course curricula. Advanced television production courses (and, therefore, advanced television production projects) are extremely scarce, almost nonexistent in the broadcast curricula. The study concludes that the television production curriculum in colleges and universities in the United States is insufficient and unrealistic in view of the technological advancements and the educational and sociological needs of the times. Appendixes contain copies of the survey instrument and cover letter. (Author/RL)

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A PROFILE OF THE PRESENT STATUS OF
TELEVISION PRODUCTION CURRICULUM IN AMERICAN
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

by

Nikos Metallinos

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INTRODUCTION

The first eight (8) courses suggested by the Minimum Standard Curriculum Committee of the Radio-Television-Film Interest Group of the Speech Association of America in their paper "The Academic Status of Broadcast Curriculum" (1966) were:

1. Introduction to Radio and Television
2. Radio and Television Announcing
3. Radio Production
4. Radio and Television Writing
5. Television Production
6. Radio and Television News Writing
7. Radio and Television Advertising
8. Station Management

The Committee's suggestion that colleges and universities develop new "specialized courses to meet the broadcast industry's need for better qualified employees" has not, in my opinion, been met. Both, institutions and industry, teachers and practitioners, have been challenged by immense technological advancements. The TV production-oriented courses offered today are only a small attempt at responding to these challenges.

The questions are: are American colleges and universities unified as to the type of TV production courses they offer; what specific

projects are assigned to students which meet the challenge of the rapidly growing technological advancements of the industry on the one hand, and the enormous sociological needs of contemporary man on the other? In short, the question is, what is the present status of the television production curriculum? On the premise that the effectiveness of a television production curriculum depends upon the particular production projects designed for the various production courses, this study surveyed the TV production curricula of all colleges and universities in an attempt to reveal the current profile of such curricula. It was predicted that:

1. Television production oriented courses would involve the students with similar TV production programs and program formats as those found in network, public, or educational and closed circuit television.
2. Assignments that are either expensive to produce or require sophisticated equipment, technical personnel, experienced talent, and production crew will not be included or encouraged.
3. Courses dealing with video experimentation in both its narrative and its electronic forms would be popular and would have a higher priority in the television production course curricula than the ones dealing with conventional TV productions.

Although the first two predictions were supported by the data, the third one was not.

There are a great variety of titles used to describe television production courses and their content. Table I below contains the common titles given to television production-oriented courses reported in this survey which coincides with TV production courses listed in The American

Film Institute's Guide to College Courses in Film and Television (1975).

TABLE I (see p. 12)

A summary description of the particular assignments, whether plain exercises, regular broadcast production programs, or final projects, is provided in Table II. The majority of these project assignments were contained in the original questionnaire sent to the departments of all colleges and universities with partial or total broadcast curricula. These departments include Communications, Speech, Radio-Television, Radio-TV-Film, Speech and Drama, Journalism, Electronic Journalism, Theatre, Television, Telecommunications, Media, English, Broadcast Technology, Radio, Communication Studies, etc. The list of TV production-oriented courses was enhanced by the individual respondent's own written categories not contained in the original questionnaire. An operational definition is given to each of the items in the table for purposes of classification.

TABLE II (see pp. 13-14)

METHOD

In order to determine the present status of TV production curricula in American Colleges and Universities, the state of television production course structure and assignments was surveyed. A list was formed of all colleges and universities which offer broadcasting courses coming from:

1. Harold Niven's Broadcast Education, Fourteenth Edition. Washington, D.C., National Association of Broadcasters, 1975.

2. Sam L. Grogg, Jr.'s (ed) The American Film Institute's Guide to College Courses in Film and Television. Washington, D.C.:

Acropolis Books, Ltd., 1975.

These sources provided a list of 228 colleges and universities offering at least one course in television production.

A standardized questionnaire was constructed which asked for course title, course number, number of students enrolled in the course, and an 18 item list of the various television assignments with space to fill in other types of assignments not listed in the survey. (See Appendix A.) This was mailed to 228 broadcast or related department chairpersons in the country asking them to fill in the questionnaire and, if they desired, to provide a syllabus of each production course taught in their department. (See Appendix B.)

Three months were allowed for completion and return of the questionnaire, and 175 responses were received—almost 78% of the total.

Table III analytically illustrates (1) the ranking or priority of the production assignments given by the instructors, (2) the level of the course (undergraduate or graduate) and (3) the total number of television production courses that assigned the particular project.

TABLE III (see p. 15)

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

This survey clearly indicates that the most common assignments among television production teachers is the interview.* Of the respondents, 75% (128 undergraduate and 3 graduate) of the courses used the TV interview as an assignment. Since it was not specified whether interviews were conducted in the studio or in the field with porta-pak, one can only speculate that in either case, an interview customarily is static, and thus easy to handle for the beginning TV producer/director. It is also valuable if one considers that the average TV station produces many interview situations in newscasts, panel discussions, talk shows, documentaries, etc.

Of 175 graduate courses, 59% use the newscast as a TV production assignment. One possible explanation for such practice is availability and popularity of porta-pak which has become so common in news gathering. Another explanation could be that many radio-television departments offer courses in conjunction with journalism and heavy emphasis is placed on newscast programs. As a production assignment, newscasts are comparatively easy to prepare, produce, and direct. Considering that newscasts occupy a large proportion of local station programming, the high occurrence of newscast assignments is not surprising.

The third category in the list is dramatic scenes: 82 undergraduate and 3 graduate courses use such assignments. More theatre de-

* This coincides with the results found by Michael O. Wirth and Lawrence Thomson in their "Survey Shows Enrollment Increases Affect Teaching TV Production." (FEEDBACK, vol XIX, No 1 May 1977, pp 1-5).

partments are cooperating with radio-television-^{film programs, and stu-}~~A~~ dents recognize the need to practice all media. The popularity of this type of assignment among the various schools is understandable since dramatic scenes taken from plays automatically offer the script, the text, the characters, indications of the scenery, props, lighting, etc., making it easier for the inexperienced television producers/directors since they do not have to originate their own materials, ideas, scripts, etc., for a class project. In addition, it is common knowledge that the preparation, production, and direction of a dramatic scene allows the student to visualize, picturize, interpret, and vivify the thoughts of somebody else, the playwright, and this is, indeed, a serious challenge. Above all, as TV production exercises (and not as final projects), the dramatic scene provides a good learning experience in TV studio production.

The public service announcement is used mostly as an exercise rather than a major television production project. Still, 79 undergraduate TV production courses include PSAs as a production assignment because they are easy to handle and are a meaningful learning experience for the beginning TV production student.

Other categories of TV production projects are remote shows, educational and sports programs.

The low ranking of educational programs was unexpected and somewhat paradoxical. While all levels of educational institutions are producing and using television more and more, apparently students are not encouraged to pursue this production form in class assignments. Perhaps the emphasis on commercial broadcasting in production courses

precludes assignment of educational projects that need systematic research, money, and ample studio time.

Considerably lower in priority were experimental projects: experiments with "video feedback," "debeaming," "shooting from below or above eye level," "staging in the z-axis," "special effects with sound and images," "chromakey," "computer animation," "electronic image synthesizer," "laser synthesizer," etc. This is unfortunate since it is the university environment that is supposed to offer the opportunity for experimentation. Yet, neither instructors nor students (in their independent project assignments) seem to pursue this area. Experimentation with the television medium is rapidly growing in independent television circles, video art galleries, and various video art studios which are supported by federal and state agencies, or various foundations. More experimentation should be encouraged within colleges and universities.

Another rather unexpected finding of this survey is the low number of graduate courses in television production offered in the various broadcast curricula. From the course title, the course number, the particular assignments, and even the number of students enrolled (which were all included in the questionnaire), only 20% (46 out of 175) were reported as either advanced or graduate TV production courses. Admittedly, an advanced TV production course does not necessarily mean graduate course, since the course numbers vary from institution to institution. Still, the results of this survey suggest that TV training, experimentation, and creativity, on a higher level, have been neglected by our broadcast curricula.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this survey tend to support its basic premises and provide a profile of the present status of television production curriculum in American colleges and universities. The conclusions drawn from the data are summarized as follows:

1. As predicted, television production oriented courses, generally, tend to involve the students with similar TV production projects and program formats as those found in network, public, or educational and closed circuit television. In fact, the most common network and public television programs are ranking higher in the TV production projects found in broadcast curricula (Interviews, Newscasts, Dramatic Scenes, etc.).
2. Expensive, difficult, and elaborate productions are not encouraged at the college and university levels since money, personnel and facilities are all minimal or non-existent in the learning institutions of America.
3. Productions of an experimental and prototype nature, explaining potentials of the TV medium appear limited and underestimated in university circles, possibly because of false pedagogical theories. (Many teachers still confuse the role of the institutions of higher education with that of the center of vocational training.)
4. Equally, advanced studies (graduate courses in advanced TV production) exploring the nature of the medium, research, ex-

perimentation and verification of production theories governing the TV medium are limited.

The television production curriculum in American colleges and universities is insufficient and unrealistic compared with the technological advancements and the educational and sociological needs of our time.

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TABLE I

Common Titles of TV Production-Oriented Courses*

1. Broadcast Communication Arts Production
2. Radio-TV Production
3. Structuring and Recording Sight and Sound
4. Video Production
5. Telecommunication Production
6. Signs, Images and Symbols Production
7. Television Production Techniques
8. Introduction to Studio Television
9. Experimental, or Experiments in Television Production
10. Television Production Design
11. Television Workshop
12. Telecommunication Programming
13. Television Production and Directing
14. Advanced Telecommunication Production
15. Directing the TV Documentary
16. TV Production Planning and Directing
17. Television Lighting, Staging, Editing, Etc.
18. Directed Projects in TV Production

*Titles were surveyed in this study and correlated with The American Film Institute's Guide to College Courses in Film and Television (1975)

TABLE II

Definitions of Common Television Production Assignments

Commercials	(short film or VTR production, 10 to 60 seconds in length, of varying content and format designed to "motivate acceptance and purchase of a commercial product.")
Dance & Dance Sequence	(choreographed staging of dance for TV)
Documentary (porta-pak)	(designed for in-depth treatment or exploration of a particular subject. May be done within studio or outside with "porta-pak" equipment)
Dramatic Scenes	(TV drama produced on film, edited videotape, or live on videotape)
Editorials	(brief expression of personal viewpoint or opinion on an item of public importance. Presented as complete program entity with opening and closing, using graphics and illustrative materials, with obvious identification as an editorial)
Educational Programs	(productions designed to communicate a message, a knowledge, to the audience...it may transmit a skill or extend cultural experiences)
Experimental Projects	(projects dealing mostly with the exploration of the video hardware facility)
Interviews	(program relying on ad lib by an interviewer and participant)
Instructional Programs	(designed to demonstrate a technique or teach a specific lesson)
Musicals	(program where main content is music featuring performers in performance)
Newscasts	(program of at least one on-camera talent relating news events of the day)
On-air Shows	(shows done live while actual event is happening)

TABLE II (continued)

Panel Discussions	(as interview, but with the host acting more as moderator and facilitator for discussion among several guests)
Public Service Announcements	(short film, slide or VTR production, 5 to 30 seconds, presenting an idea or announcement of an item of public importance)
Remote (truck)	(productions done outside the studio with the conventional remote TV truck)
Sign-on/off	(exercises in opening and closing of TV show)
Slide/Lecture Presentation	(program presenting discourse by one lecturer using slides)
Sports	(programs depicting sports events)
Student-initiated Projects	(projects initiated by students themselves rather than by the instructor)
Variety Shows	(program utilizing a review of acts; usually involving some combination of comedy sketches, song and dance)

TABLE III

Production Assignments
(n = 175 Courses)

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Undergrad</u>	<u>Grad.</u>	<u>Total</u>
1	Interviews	128	3	131
2	Newscasts	102	1	103
3	Dramatic Scenes	83	4	87
4	Public Service Announcements	79	0	79
5	Instructional Programs	69	5	74
6	Panel Discussions	66	2	68
7	Documentaries—Studio	62	2	64
8	Variety Shows	57	3	60
9	Documentaries—Porta-Pak	48	2	50
10	Musicals	48	1	49
11	Dance and Dance Sequences	43	1	44
12	Commercials	35	1	36
13	Editorials	25	0	25
14	Student-initiated Projects	22	1	23
15	Experimental Projects (Video Feedback)	20	0	20
16	Experimental Projects (Other)	16	0	16
17	On-air Shows	7	0	7
18	Remote (truck)	6	0	6
19	Educational Programs	3	1	4
20	Sports	4	0	4
21	Slide/Lecture Presentations	3	0	3
22	Sign-on/off	1	0	1

APPENDIX A

A SURVEY OF THE PRESENT STATUS
OF TELEVISION PRODUCTION
AT THE COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEVEL

A SURVEY OF THE PRESENT STATUS OF TELEVISION
PRODUCTION AT THE COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEVELS

I am surveying the specific projects assigned to students in courses dealing with beginning and advanced television production, television design, television experimentation, porta-pak television, television aesthetics, etc. Please fill in the form below and return promptly. Please fill in one survey form for each TV course you teach.

COURSE TITLE: _____

COURSE NUMBER: _____

NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN COURSE: _____

TELEVISION ASSIGNMENTS (check all that apply)

public service announcements	_____
editorials	_____
interviews	_____
panel discussions	_____
newscasts	_____
dramatic scenes	_____
variety shows	_____
musicals	_____
dance and dance sequences	_____
instructional programs	_____
documentaries--porta-pak	_____
documentaries--studio	_____
experimental projects	_____
(video feedback)	_____
experimental projects	_____
(specify)	_____
others (explain)	_____

Thank You,

Dr. Nikos Metallinos
Department of Radio-TV-Film
Temple University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE LETTER WITH
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE



TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS AND THEATER
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19122

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

I am conducting a survey on the present status of television production within the colleges and universities in the United States. I am interested in finding out:

What specific projects (exercises and final projects) are assigned to students by the instructors in the courses dealing with television production, television design, television experimentation, porta-pak, television aesthetics, etc., in both undergraduate and graduate levels. Simply list the types of projects (shows or programs) assigned to each class each semester (or quarter).

Ideally, a syllabus of each of these classes would help tremendously, but I realize that sometimes professors do not want to give away syllabi. I assure you that such materials will not be copied or published. I am specifically interested in finding out the nature and the format of television production assignments. Neither the institution nor the author will be mentioned if it is so stated in your response.

I will appreciate your cooperation in this matter and I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Nikos Metallinos
Assistant Professor
Department of Radio-TV-Film
Temple University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

NM:bm